

Hydroelectric power to stay on Klamath River

19 November 2007

[Greenwire](#)

© 2007 E&E Publishing, LLC. All Rights Reserved

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission in Grants Pass, Ore., said last week that four PacifiCorp hydroelectric dams can stay on the Klamath River, leading to angry reactions from Indian tribes, farmers and commercial salmon fishers.

The commission's decision ignored calls from fishery agencies to build costly fish ladders and instead recommended trapping and hauling fish around the dams, according to the commission's final environmental impact statement.

Craig Tucker, Klamath campaign director for the Karuk Tribe, blasted the decision. "FERC staff is pandering to PacifiCorp's bottom line, where it is cheaper for everybody and avoids an environmental catastrophe and the destruction of tribal cultures to simply remove the dams," he said.

The utility said it would be willing to remove the dams if the move does not hurt its customers. It said it also is willing to spend \$300 million on fish ladders and other improvements required to keep the dams (Los Angeles Times, Nov. 17).

New phase for China's hydroelectric project could displace more than 300,000 people

China's push to harness hydroelectric power, which accounts for 6 percent of the country's power supply, comes at the cost of hundreds of thousands of displaced people and extreme environmental damage, critics warn. "In western China, the one-sided pursuit of economic benefits from hydropower has come at the expense of relocated people, the environment and the land and its cultural heritage," Fan Xiao, a Sichuan Province geologist and a critic of the Three Gorges project said. "Hydropower development is disorderly and uncontrolled, and it has reached a crazy scale."

In recent weeks, Chinese officials also acknowledged the problems caused by the Three Gorges Dam, including water pollution and landslides, as well as the displacement of 1.13 million people. In his 2007 work report to the National People's Congress, Prime Minister Wen Jiabao noted that over many years, dam building has displaced 23 million people in China. Studies show the region near the Three Gorges Dam's population density is almost twice the national average. Environmental damage has also been noted, with deforestation leading to severe soil erosion.

But advocates say hydropower is one of China's richest and least tapped energy sources because of a knot of rivers that flow out of the Tibetan high plateau. The country uses about one-fourth of its hydropower potential, but to meet its enormous energy demands,

China wants 15 percent of the country's energy consumption to come from renewable sources by 2020, compared with 7.5 percent today.

Chen Deming, one of the country's top economic planners, said hydropower was a critical noncarbon energy source and described the negative impacts of dams as "controllable." He said officials would emphasize environmental protection and resettlement issues on future projects.

The Three Gorges Dam is the de facto anchor of a planned system of more than 12 hydropower mega-bases on the middle and upper reaches of the Yangtze River. The government-owned corporation that built the Three Gorges Dam has already started construction on three of the 12 large projects.

New laws require dam projects to undergo environmental impact studies and also provide opportunities for public comment and oversight. But those laws are easy to circumvent or ignore. Xiluodu, which will be the country's second-largest hydropower station when complete in 2015, is being built in a national protection zone for several species of endangered fish (Jim Yardley, New York Times, Nov. 19).

Demolition crews last week blew up the last buildings of 1,800-year-old Kaixian, the final county seat flooded by the Three Gorges Dam.

The dam was finished in 2006, and the reservoir is being filled up in stages before it reaches the final height of 175 meters by 2009.

After nearly 1.4 million people were displaced by the dam's construction, the government is saying it wants to encourage residents along the banks of the reservoir -- which researchers estimate to be roughly 2.3 million people -- to leave the countryside.

Last week a Chongqing spokesman denied that millions would be forcibly relocated. "The reports that another 4 million people will be moved out of the Three Gorges Reservoir area are not accurate," city spokesman Wen Tianping said at a media briefing. "The municipality aims to attract 3 to 4 million people from rural and urban areas by 2020 to narrow the urban-rural wealth gap" (Shai Oster, Wall Street Journal [subscription required], Nov. 19). -- SG